



Access to cash remains first-rate in France

Structurally, access to cash in metropolitan France is very satisfactory. There has been a modest reduction in the number of bank-managed automated teller machines (ATMs) since 2018 but this streamlining of cash facilities has not compromised accessibility. This reduction is concentrated in the best-equipped municipalities and is also offset by the significant development of certain banking network cash dispensers placed in partner retail outlets. A range of initiatives proposed by cash industry players to facilitate or improve cash distribution services are planned or are underway. The French public authorities also support these initiatives insofar as they are likely to maintain a good level of access to cash across the country.

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99.9%

share of the population located less than 15 minutes by car from a cash dispenser

-9%

reduction in the number of automated teller machines between 2018 and 2021

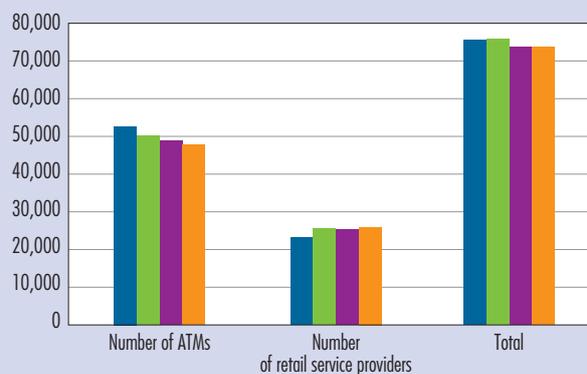
+12%

increase in the number of cash dispensers at retail outlets between 2018 and 2021

Change in the cash distribution network in metropolitan France

(in units)

■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021



Source: Banque de France.

Note: ATM, automated teller machine.



Studies on access to cash in France have been carried out in close cooperation with cash industry players since 2018.

1 The Banque de France ensures cash accessibility

The “accessibility” working group

At the end of 2018, the Cash Industry Steering Committee, chaired by the Banque de France, set up a working group on cash accessibility. By virtue of its monetary strategy mission, the Banque de France guarantees free choice of means of payment and consequently ensures universal access to cash. The working group also falls within the more general framework of initiatives underway to define a National Cash Management Policy (see Box 1).

In accordance with its mandate, the working group on cash accessibility maps and analyses cash distribution services in France. Every year in July since 2018, the Banque de France has published an update report on

public access to cash in metropolitan France based on the working group’s research.¹ The report is prepared in close cooperation with the various cash industry partners (particularly the French Treasury, credit institutions, cash-in-transit and cash-handling companies). The seven banking groups that participate in the working group (BNP Paribas, BPCE, Crédit Agricole, Crédit Mutuel, HSBC, La Banque Postale and Société Générale) account for 99% of France’s ATM fleet.

On 4 October 2022, an integrated governance model (merger between the Cash Industry Steering Committee and the National Cashless Payments Committee) was adopted to create the National Payments Committee (NPC), bestowed with a consolidated view of all payment means, from cash to digital payments. This arrangement, which already exists at the European level and in other Eurosystem countries, means it will be possible to oversee the organisation of payment means in a comprehensive and even more rational manner. As an extension of the NPC, the working group on cash accessibility’s activities will continue within a new framework, the “cash continuity” working group, which will report to the NPC.

BOX 1

France’s National Cash Management Policy (NCMP)

Access to cash is one of the five pillars of the National Cash Management Policy (NCMP) developed in conjunction with the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance and all cash industry players.

The NCMP complements the national cashless payment strategy adopted in France in 2015. It complies with the principles of neutrality and free choice of means of payment and follows two rules: (i) to not seek to favour one means of payment over another or to influence the behaviour and preferences of the public; and (ii) to ensure that cash remains a secure and easily accessible means of payment for all those who wish to use it, particularly vulnerable populations.

The other four strategic pillars in addition to cash accessibility are: (i) acceptability of cash as a means of payment; (ii) quality of banknotes in circulation; (iii) robustness of the cash industry; and (iv) efficiency of the cash industry (particularly in terms of management costs throughout the value processing chain and in terms of the environment).

¹ See, for example, the most recent publication: *Report on public access to cash in metropolitan France*, Banque de France, July 2022.



What do we mean by accessibility?

Cash “accessibility” is defined as the ease with which the public (individuals and businesses) can obtain banknotes. For the purposes of its remit, the working group regards “accessibility” as the facility of geographical access to cash, in time and distance, as opposed to other possible definitions of the term (accessibility for persons with disabilities or for the elderly or dependent, for example).

Two main cash distribution channels are taken into account in its analyses:

- **Automated teller machines (ATMs)**

ATMs are connected to the network of the French “banking card” Economic Interest Group (GIE CB, *Groupement d'intérêt économique – cartes bancaires*). They provide a universal cash access service. They are available to all, and, in some cases, for a longer period of time than a normal working day (on-site ATMs accessible from the street or off-site ATMs in outlets with longer opening hours than their operating bank).²

Since 2020, this category has also included ATMs owned and managed by non-bank operators, referred to as “independent ATMs”. In France, three operators shared the independent ATM market in 2022 (see Section 3).

- **Retail service providers (and similar)**

This service relies on retail outlets working in partnership with bank networks, offering additional cash distribution services solely to customers of those networks. Four banking groups provide this type of service (see Section 3).

The scope of the working group’s activities is restricted to cash withdrawals in metropolitan France (the issue of deposit points is therefore not considered) and to people aged 15 and over (a category considered to be old enough to use payment services) as reported by the *Institut national de la statistique et des études*

économiques (INSEE – the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies).

Indicators chosen for their clarity and ease of understanding

In order to measure access to cash in metropolitan France, the working group relies on the analysis of (i) cash supply (based on a GIE CB-provided list of cash dispensers in the country in December of each year, supplemented with individual banking group data to add private cash dispensers in particular) and (ii) cash demand estimated on the basis of population size.

Using the geographical coordinates of the cash dispensers, it is possible to create a database of equipment in metropolitan France according to the municipality in which it is located, and to present the results cartographically. The number of ATMs and retail service providers can thus be monitored. However, the level of accessibility cannot be assessed in detail with such “basic” indicators. For example, if a small town centre has three bank branches within 200 metres of each other, each with their own ATM, or if a bank branch has two ATMs, taking away an ATM in either case will reduce the total number of ATMs counted but will not affect cash accessibility for someone living in this area. Therefore, more detailed indicators are also used.

The calculated indicators have been designed to be both descriptive and analytical but still suitable for a general audience. As the work on cash accessibility is primarily intended to be informative, clarity and ease of understanding are imperative.

Two measurements of accessibility are thus favoured:

- cash dispenser capacity (the number of cash access points relative to the number of people aged 15 and over residing in a municipality);
- travel time (by car, by road) to the nearest cash dispenser from the municipality of residence.

² Around 45% of ATMs in France are located on the wall of their operating bank’s branch and 45% are in the branch itself or in a specific vestibule attached to the branch. Almost 10% of bank ATMs are located “off-site” (shopping centres, railway stations, airports, etc.). This breakdown rarely changes over time.



2 Cash accessibility remains highly satisfactory

The streamlining of the ATM fleet has not altered access to cash

The network of cash dispensers in metropolitan France remains dense despite several years of streamlining. The breakdown shows that there were 47,853 ATMs at the end of 2021, down 9% compared with 52,623 ATMs three years previously.

This network is consistent with the “socially acceptable” number of ATMs for France, which, based on the methodology³ developed by the European Central Bank in 2021, is between 44,000 and 52,000. In order to ensure that cash access coverage is socially optimal, a certain redistribution is required: while the total number of ATMs currently seems adequate to meet the needs of French citizens, results from this analysis also indicate that to some extent, ATMs should ideally continue to be

removed from large urban areas and installed in rural and peri-urban areas.

This evolution, which is mainly the result of the streamlining of the existing ATM fleet, is due to the removal of “redundant ATMs” (several ATMs located in the same branch or group of branches in the same municipality). Reducing the number of ATMs in the most densely populated municipalities therefore has no real impact on cash accessibility. In addition, France falls within the European average when taking into consideration the number of ATMs per inhabitant (see Box 2).

The country’s ATM coverage has thus remained broadly unchanged from one year to the next since 2018, and the level of cash accessibility remains highly satisfactory:

- A little more than 99% of France’s metropolitan population resides in either a municipality with at least one ATM, or in a municipality located less than 15 minutes by car from the nearest cash access facility.

BOX 2

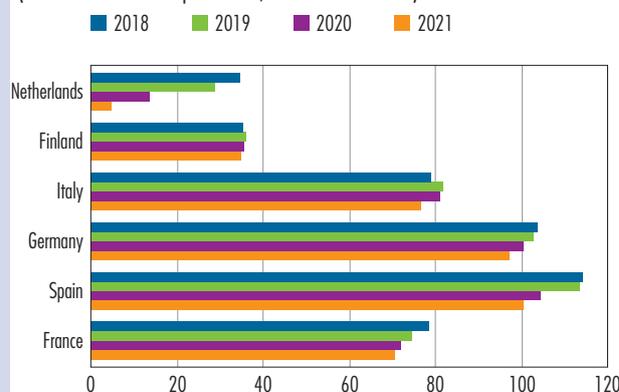
Comparisons across Europe

France had just over 70 automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 inhabitants¹ at the end of 2021. This puts France within the average range of its euro area neighbours, behind countries such as Germany and Spain whose cash use is more intensive and which are therefore even better equipped, but ahead of the northern European countries (the Netherlands, Finland), where more cashless payments are made and cash distribution infrastructures are therefore less developed. France sits virtually on a par with Italy.

¹ For comparison purposes, the population used here is the overall population (and not solely people aged 15 and over) reported by Eurostat. ATM data are taken from the working group on cash accessibility for France and from the ECB’s Statistical Data Warehouse (SDW) for the other countries.

Comparative change in automated teller machine (ATM) fleets by country

(number of ATMs per 100,000 inhabitants)



Sources: European Central Bank (Statistical Data Warehouse), Banque de France.

³ The WATCH 2 (Workstream on Access to Cash 2) working group, which developed a methodology to optimise the number of cash dispensers in a country.



When the travel time is limited to five minutes, this figure falls to a little under 83% (see Appendix on as-the-crow-flies indicators used by the European Central Bank for comparative purposes).

- Around 6,550 municipalities, accounting for 77.3% of the population, have at least one ATM.
- On average, the travel time by car for a resident of a municipality without an ATM facility to the nearest dispenser was a little over eight minutes.

A context of continually declining cash use

The streamlining of the ATM fleet by banks is the result of cash being used less at the point-of-sale (POS). POS cash use declined from 68% of all transactions by volume in 2016 to 59% in 2019.⁴

This is due to changes in consumption patterns, particularly with the expansion of e-commerce, and in payment habits, with an ever-greater preference for digital payments.

In this respect, the Covid-19 health crisis (which resulted in lockdowns, administrative closures of shops and a sharp decline in ATM withdrawals) and the raising of the maximum contactless payment amount to EUR 50 in May 2020, intensified competition from contactless instruments in the low-value payment segment in local POS outlets, where cash use has traditionally been a mainstay.

Banks are developing complementary cash distribution services

Cash also continued to be very easily accessible thanks to private cash dispensers (retail service providers and similar, accessible to customers of the retailer's partner banking network only), which have expanded considerably in recent years (up almost 12% since 2018 to a high of 25,949 outlets at the end of 2021).

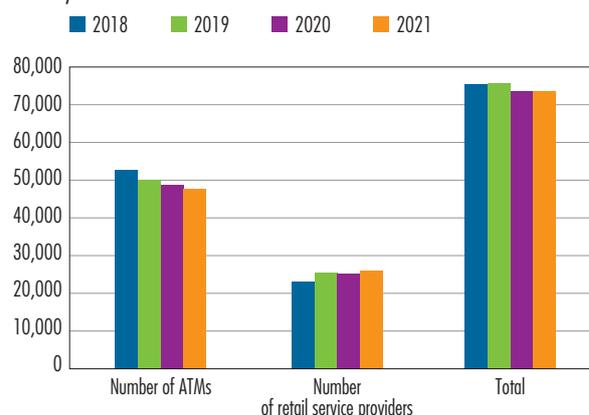
These private services, provided mainly by local stores and tobacconists, are concentrated in small municipalities (with less than 5,000 inhabitants) and make a significant contribution to the improvement in public cash access in certain – particularly rural – regions that have no or few ATMs.

Overall, taking into account these private cash dispensers, the cash distribution network in metropolitan France has remained largely stable, declining by 2.6% from around 75,800 dispensers in 2018 to 73,800 in 2021 (a reduction of 2,000 in less than three years – see chart below).

Furthermore, since the analysis began in 2018, accessibility indicators have remained almost identical, with, for example, more than 14 dispensers (ATMs and private cash dispensers) per 10,000 inhabitants and 99.9% of the population residing within 15 minutes of the nearest facility (see Tables a and b below).

Change in the cash distribution network in metropolitan France

(in units)



Source: Banque de France.
Note: ATM, automated teller machine.

⁴ See the results, for France, of the surveys carried out by the European Central Bank on household payment attitudes in the euro area (SUCH 2016 and SPACE 2019).



Changes in the accessibility indicators since 2018

a) Capacity

(number of ATMs or cash dispensers per 10,000 inhabitants)

	Capacity per 10,000 inhabitants	Number of ATMs ^{a)}	Number of cash dispensers
2018		10.0	14.4
2021		9.1	14.0

a) Automated teller machine.

b) Travel time

(share of the population with cash access according to travel time, in %)

Travel time	2021	
	To the nearest ATM	To the nearest cash dispenser
Less than 5 minutes	82.9	94.5
Less than 10 minutes	94.9	99.4
Less than 15 minutes	99.2	99.9

Source: Banque de France.

Note: While some variations (of one decimal place, notably on the five-minute travel time indicator) can be seen during 2018 to 2021, the travel-time accessibility results remained extremely stable over the entire period. In particular, only the 2021 results are shown in the travel-time indicator table because the results for 2018 were identical to 2021.

When private dispensers are included in the analysis, the travel time by road to reach a municipality that has cash access facilities tends to shorten significantly,

irrespective of the regions concerned (see Charts a and b). This demonstrates the importance of these alternative cash dispensers in facilitating access to cash in France.

Comparison of travel times by road

a) To an automated teller machine (ATM)

b) To the nearest cash dispenser

■ Less than 5 minutes ■ From 5 to 10 minutes ■ More than 10 minutes



Source: Banque de France.

Interpretation: The deeper the blue on the map, the shorter the average travel time by road to a cash dispensing facility.



3 Interesting prospects with the emergence of new cash distribution channels

The rise in ATMs operated by non-bank players

As banks continue to adapt their ATM network, new non-bank operators are also rolling out cash dispensers, referred to as independent ATMs, across France. At the moment, there are three operators in the country: the US company, Euronet, and the two main cash-in-transit service providers in France, Brink's and Loomis.

Although these independent ATMs have been in operation for several years in France, their importance was very marginal (accounting for less than one percentage point of all cash dispensers) with no notable development until 2020. However, 2021 saw extremely dynamic growth in independent ATMs and their number almost tripled to over 300 ATMs during the year.

Consequently, the analyses for 2022 include these figures for the first time, and the 2020 and 2021 reports have been adjusted retrospectively.⁵

Various roll-out strategies can be seen. One strategy is to favour places with high footfall, particularly abroad (airports, railway stations, tourist areas or near borders, etc.). Targeting this type of customer base means that additional commission can be earned on foreign exchange transactions, thus tending to make operating ATMs more profitable. Another strategy is to agree public-private partnerships with poorly served rural municipalities or rural communities with little cash dispensing infrastructure.

The development of cash distribution networks in retail outlets

For the time being, cash dispensers in retail outlets are still in the minority. Nevertheless, in the long term their development could transform the way in which the public accesses cash in France.

The French Monetary and Financial Code (*Code monétaire et financier*) formally provides for two means of withdrawing cash in a point-of-sale outlet:

- When making a purchase from a retailer, a customer can settle the transaction, for example by card, for an amount that exceeds the price of the good or service acquired and get the difference back in cash. The purchase price of the good or service must be at least EUR 1 and the cash withdrawn cannot exceed EUR 60. This transaction is referred to as cashback. However, cashback seems to have been very little used since its legal framework was finalised in January 2019;
- A customer in a retail outlet can withdraw cash in the same way but without the associated obligation to purchase.⁶ This service, known as cash-in-shop, can only be offered to customers of the retail outlet's partner bank and is provided through the 25,000 or so private cash dispensers mentioned above. In France, these include BNP Paribas' *points Nickel*, Crédit Agricole's *relais CA*, Crédit Mutuel's *points relais* and various other La Banque Postale *points de contact*.⁷ Public access to these services is restricted to the opening hours of the retailers concerned.

⁵ Independent ATMs are not included in the ATM fleet count for 2018 and 2019, due to their extremely marginal volumes (a few dozen) and the fact that they have no impact on the calculations of the accessibility indicators for those periods.

⁶ Legally, this transaction is carried out within the framework of a payment service, provided by a retailer as an "agent" of a payment service provider, or within the framework of a mandate granted to a retailer by a credit institution so that the mandated retailer can dispense cash to that institution's customers.

⁷ Post offices without ATMs, municipal and inter-municipal postal agencies, La Poste points of sale.



Other innovative projects in development

Three of the financial centre's main commercial banks (Crédit Mutuel, BNP Paribas and Société Générale), which account for nearly one-third of current cash dispensing facilities, are planning to pool their ATMs. This arrangement is expected to be launched in 2023.

This project was inspired by the ATM pooling models seen elsewhere in Europe and aims to combine cash withdrawal services in locations with a high concentration of ATMs while ensuring that local services for customers of all three networks are maintained.

Other projects under consideration notably include the possibility of making the cash-in-shop service available to all, allowing the retailers concerned to distribute cash to any customer and not just to clients of the mandating bank. Cash-in-transit companies are also developing initiatives to expand their cash distribution services. Equally, Fintechs too are keen to offer their own solutions to facilitate cash distribution in France.

The French public authorities (Banque de France, the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance) warmly welcome these solutions insofar as they are likely to improve access to cash in the country. The framework within which some of these projects could be brought to fruition is currently being considered.



Appendix

As-the-crow-flies accessibility indicators

For purposes of comparability and simplicity, the European Central Bank uses as-the-crow-flies distances (i.e. straight lines between two points) in its work on euro area cash accessibility even though it is less representative of the reality on the ground. The results for metropolitan France are shown in the table below.

As is the case for the travel-time (by road) indicators, some variation (of one decimal place, notably on the five-kilometre indicator) can be seen during 2018 to 2021. Nevertheless, the results of the as-the-crow-flies accessibility measurement remained extremely stable over the entire period.

Share of the population within x km as the crow flies of the nearest cash dispenser in 2018 and 2021

(%)

Distance (as the crow flies)	2018		2021	
	To the nearest ATM	To the nearest cash dispenser	To the nearest ATM	To the nearest cash dispenser
5 kilometres	91.7	99.1	91.6	99.1
10 kilometres	99.5	100.0	99.5	100.0
15 kilometres	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Banque de France.

Note: ATM, automated teller machine.

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